

No. 3985 barrels through Iowa



Crowds of rail enthusiasts and curiosity seekers gathered June 25 -26 to marvel at the Union Pacific Challenger No. 3985. Challenger, the world's largest operating steam locomotive, barreled through Iowa billowing clouds of smoke as onlookers watched and snapped photos. The locomotive left Trenton, Miss., June 25, traveled to Des Moines for a short stop, and proceeded to Boone for an overnight stay.

According to the Challenger Web site, the locomotive was designed by Union Pacific and built in 1943 by the American Locomotive Company. Challenger 3985 is one of 105 Challengers built between 1936 and 1943 and is the only operating engine of its class in the world today.

No. 3985 last operated in "regular" train service in 1957. It was retired in 1962 and stored in the roundhouse in Cheyenne, Wyo., until 1975, when it was placed on display near the Cheyenne depot. A group of Union Pacific employees volunteered their services to restore the locomotive to running condition in 1981. The locomotive now tours the country promoting railroading and pulling trains for charity events.



Background

The name Challenger was given to steam locomotives with a 4-6-6-4 wheel arrangement. This means that they have four wheels in the leading "pilot" truck, which helps guide the locomotive into curves; two sets of six "driving" wheels, and finally, four "trailing" wheels, which support the rear of the engine and its massive fire box. Each set of driving wheels has its own steam cylinder. The result, in essence, is two engines under one boiler.

The frame of the locomotive is "**articulated,**" or hinged, to allow it to go through curves. When watching the approaching locomotive go through a curve, you can see the boiler swing out left or right independently of the lower half of the engine as the rear half of the locomotive remains in a straight direction until its wheels and frame are halfway through the curve.

The Challengers were designed for fast freight service, but occasionally pulled passenger trains. No. 3985 originally burned coal and pulled a tender with a 32-ton capacity. In 1990 it was converted to use No. 5 oil. The top speed of No. 3985 is about 70 miles an hour.